



Drive Up Standards

NEWSLETTER

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

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NEW MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Hear are what school bus workers who have joined our union within the past year have to say about their membership...



"[At our yard] we have a lot of single parents, a lot of people who want to make this their career. It would behoove us to have someone that can support us, and the Teamsters union

does that. I had never been a Teamster, but I always heard about the solidarity and camaraderie. That's why I came to it."

– Tillman Walker, Irving, TX Local 745

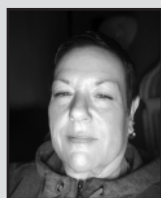


"What we did was we went online to find the best union for bus transportation, so of course we found Teamsters.

A lot of the other First Student yards in the region have the

Teamsters. Now we're going with them, we're proud, and we're Teamsters, too."

– Chrystal Echols, Maywood, Ill. Local 777



"It feels awesome to have won this election, we worked incredibly hard to make this go through. We just want to be treated fairly. I worked at the post office for years, I was a

member of the union at the post office, I know what a union can do. It only serves to better us, it's not going to hurt us, that's for sure."

– Pam Dupre, Windsor, Conn. Local 671



New Contractor, New Contract

When These School Bus Drivers in Chattanooga Changed Companies, They Kept Their Collective Bargaining Agreement

After a two-year process, school bus drivers and monitors in Chattanooga finalized their first union contract in May of 2019, but these dedicated Local 327 members would still experience one more change. The Hamilton County School District had decided to drop their contractor and switch to a new company – First Student. The good news, as many Teamster school bus drivers already know, is that the Teamsters have a long-standing relationship with First Student which includes a National Master Agreement (NMA) that covers every single Teamster school bus driver and monitor in North America.

The First Student National Master Agreement (NMA) was the first national contract that the Teamsters negotiated with a school bus company. It has a number of rules that the Teamsters have used as a model for bargaining when it comes to the aspects of a union contract that are unrelated to money – job security, seniority and safety standards are just a few of the components that are covered in the NMA.

"With First Student taking over the contract from the school district, these workers were now covered by the First Student National Master Agreement – a contract that they wouldn't have been covered under had Hamilton County Schools decided to stick with their original contractor," said Jim Shurling, Southern Region Representative for the Passenger Transportation Division. Shurling and Local 327 President Joe Bennett worked together on transitioning the ratified union contract to a First Student agreement that is a supplement to the NMA. "The workers demonstrated tremendous courage throughout this process," said Bennett. "From the organizing campaign to

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The Teamsters "Drive Up Standards" newsletter is by and for school bus drivers, monitors and mechanics. This newsletter is published quarterly in print and online at www.driveupstandards.org.



A Members Guide to Navigating Your Local Union

If you're new to the Teamsters, chances are that you're unfamiliar with the various structures in place and the roles that they play – it can seem overwhelming. Fortunately, the various components of your union are easy to get the hang of once you break them down into their individual parts. With that in mind, here is a quick overview of the Teamsters' structure at the local level –

LOCAL UNION – All solutions to worker problems must be made through the local union because the local union is responsible to all members, not just a few individuals. The structure of the Teamsters Union is unique in that most of the money paid by the members is kept at the local union level, where it is used to represent Teamster members on a day-to-day basis. Teamsters locals are independent and each local union makes decisions that are in the best interest of the members they represent. A number of structures have been built into the Teamsters to assist local unions with organizing, contract negotiations, political action, education and industry-specific issues.

LEADERSHIP – Local autonomy gives the members more control over their affairs

than most other unions. Many local unions retain experienced labor attorneys, full-time business agents, organizers, administrators and clerical staff. The members elect their leaders from within the ranks of the membership. Teamster leaders emerging in this environment are equipped to fill the roles of skilled negotiators, organizers and business agents. This goes a long way toward establishing and maintaining the stability of the organization while providing democratic control over the relationship between members and leaders. The Teamster members of today are the Teamster leaders of tomorrow.

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS – One of the most important responsibilities of a Teamster member is attending the monthly membership meetings. The membership meeting is where you get the opportunity to exercise your democratic rights within the local. It is where you make your voice heard in relation to issues of importance in the workplace as well as decisions being made by your elected union leadership. It's also where we learn what's going on in our locals and how to participate in union activities. Also keep in mind that other members

may need encouragement to attend or may have a difficult time getting to the meeting. Going as a group gives you time to discuss issues with fellow members.

SHOP STEWARDS – The steward system is the way through which members enforce their rights in the workplace, and the first contact a member will have with their union. Each local differs somewhat in the way stewards are selected and the duties that they are given. The number of stewards that your bargaining unit has varies from workplace to workplace. Usually you will have a designated steward for your job, area or shift.

Every time you have a problem in relation to your employer, you should let the steward know about it. It is helpful to write down any pertinent information so you and the steward can work together to document any violation of your rights. Some actions taken by management are direct violations of your rights spelled out in the contract or law, and need to be processed through the appropriate procedures. Other actions, while annoying or hurtful, may not be violations and; therefore, cannot be processed through the contract.

Teamsters Advocate for School Bus Safety on Capitol Hill

Local 384 Secretary-Treasurer Matt Condron testified at the U.S. House of Representatives as part of a panel of experts and stakeholders at a hearing, "Examining the Federal Role in Improving School Bus Safety." Condron advocated for greater federal oversight at the hearing, which was held to evaluate current school bus safety measures.

"Federal laws and regulations do almost nothing to help school bus drivers," Condron said. "Once a school bus comes off the manufacturing line, there are no federal rules requiring that it be kept in safe working condition. Many people are shocked to learn that the U.S. government plays almost no role for in setting minimum standards for school bus operations in our country."

A critical role for federal oversight that Condron identified at the hearing was the process by which cities and towns award contracts to school bus companies.

Roughly one third of municipalities hire private companies for student transportation and many are required by law to hire the least expensive bid on a contract. This creates a perverse incentive for bad actors in the industry where they can cut back safety standards to



reduce the cost of operating, thus lowering their bid and increasing their odds of winning a contract as a result.

"Private companies whose business is to make money or smaller school districts strapped for cash are often left to decide whether or not investing in safe drivers and new buses is a smart financial decision instead of whether or not it's the right one," said Condron. "This should never be just a dollars or cents calculation; it should be based on what is safest for our children each and every time. In my view, many of these problems come down to a lack of rules governing school bus operation across the country."

Pat Ryan and Donna Schultz are school bus drivers and members of Local 384. They both said that they were glad the Teamsters were going to Congress to address the role that the private sector plays in school bus safety.

"When you're transporting kids, safety is the number one priority, for you and for the other people on the road," Ryan said. "I think the focus is always on the driver; while the ultimate responsibility is on the driver, I think the manufacturer and the way these buses are built has a lot to do with it also. For instance, you have some manufacturers that say their buses are built to hold 72 kids. In reality, that's 72 kindergartners, without backpacks, three kids to a seat. You think that same bus can hold 72 high school or middle school kids? No way! Forget it."

"There has to be more resources dedicated to ensuring that other motorists are concerned with and paying attention to school bus safety," Schultz said. "We need to make sure that people who aren't adhering to school bus safety are held accountable. Maybe when the severity of the issue is brought to light it will be properly addressed."

New Contractor, New Contract

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winning a contract, this process took over two years, but they stood united. I couldn't be prouder of the amazing things that these men and women have done."

Katie Williams has been a critical part of the movement to get a union contract for school bus workers in Hamilton County. She said that negotiating the first contract was a pretty extensive undertaking, but the process got less difficult as time went on.

"It took a while to get that first contract, but being on the same playing field with management without them being able to look down on us, that was actually quite nice," Williams said. "Negotiating with First Student was a lot easier than the first contract we negotiated, it only took about a day. The company didn't put up a fight or anything like that. They just wanted to make sure that the first contract lined up with their national agreement, and that's what we wanted, too."

Chattanooga is not an easy place to negotiate a union contract – Tennessee is a state with less than six percent of workers unionized (as of 2018). If Chattanooga drivers and monitors can overcome the odds to win a union contract, school bus drivers and monitors everywhere can do the same thing.

"We fought so hard for this and went through so much to get this agreement, and it just feels amazing now that all of our hard work has paid off," Williams said. "It's incredible, the things that you can accomplish when you refuse to give up."

Contract Victories

Durham School Services – Memphis, Tenn.

Durham School Services drivers and monitors in Memphis, Tenn. voted overwhelmingly to ratify a contract with Local 667 that will set a higher standard for close to 600 workers who provide pupil transportation for Shelby County Schools. Denise Tinsdall, Jennifer Elliot and Lennette Beyah are Durham drivers who assisted with negotiating and ratifying the newest contract.

"I'm so excited with our new Teamster contract!" Tinsdall said. "We will now be guaranteed three paid days off this year and four days off every year after so that we can take care of ourselves and our families during the school year."

"This was my first time sitting at the table to negotiate with the company," said Elliot. "We stayed strong and got what we needed. I'm proud that we raised the four-hour minimum pay guarantee to five hours; this will really help our brothers and sisters at Durham of Memphis."

"This isn't our first contract with Durham, but it is our best," said Beyah. "I'm proud of the new contract. We got the monitors to 15 dollars an hour, and the drivers will top out at 24 dollars an hour. It is definitely a new day at Durham!"

First Student – Tacoma, Wash. First Student drivers represented by Teamsters Local 313 voted to ratify a collective bargaining agreement that covers roughly 160 drivers who provide student transportation services for students attending Tacoma public schools. Joe Schott is a Local 313 Shop Steward who has been a Teamster for more than ten years, and he served on the negotiating committee during bargaining with the company.

"I've been doing this for a number of years, and I feel really good about this contract," Schott said. "Nothing was given to us, we earned everything that we got in these negotiations. We stood our ground and everyone worked so well together. It was a good team effort, and I'm proud that I was a part of it."

First Student – Brooklyn Park, Minn. Workers at First Student in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota voted overwhelmingly to ratify a four-year agreement with Local 638. The new contract includes significant wage increases, up to nine paid holidays, improved sick time language and an employer match with the Teamsters 401(k) plan that exceeds what is offered by many of the other private school bus contractors in the Twin Cities metro area.

"The bargaining committee remained

strong and united throughout negotiations, and we were able to present a committee-recommended offer to the membership," said Trevor Lawrence, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 638. "The membership showed the committee their support by accepting this offer by a wide majority, and we look forward to four more years of labor peace."

Illinois Central – Wilmington, St. Charles and Carol Stream, Ill.

In August Teamsters in the Chicago metropolitan area ratified three contracts in less than two weeks for over 500 drivers and monitors working for Illinois Central School Bus: Local 179 unanimously ratified a contract for workers at the Wilmington, Ill. location and Local 777 ratified contracts at the Carol Stream and St. Charles locations by a 90 percent margin of victory. Scott Bublitz is a driver and shop steward from the St. Charles yard who helped negotiate the supplemental agreement covering his facility. He said that having a Teamster contract has been good for both his co-workers and his employer.

"I like that we have an ongoing dialogue with the company," Bublitz said. "We have excellent representation; we're being paid fairly for the work that we do and we're being treated fairly as well."



On behalf of myself and all of us at the IBT Passenger Transportation Division, we'd like to wish a happy, healthy and successful new year to you and your families. Last year our union family was blessed with continued growth in our division brought forth by the ongoing momentum of workers all across the country realizing their power as they engage in collective action to improve their lives, their jobs and their communities. Let's hope that next year is as good as this one was for the 60,000 bus workers and the 1.4 million hard-working men and women that I am honored to call my Teamster brothers and sisters.

With Solidarity,

Rick Middleton

Have a question or story idea?
Email us at
driveupstandards1@gmail.com



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